

Rocky Gap State Park Aviary

Fall 2005 Newsletter



Let's recap the summer!

The Aviary had a good summer. Due to staff shortages, the Scales & Tales staff focused on programs based in the park, doing fewer programs out of the park. In-house programs and educational information were presented to many people including members from camps, bus tours, school groups, campers and the general public.

The staff and volunteers gave the eight-year-old Aviary a well-needed paint job. Work was also done on the individual cages, providing new perches for many of the birds of prey. Staff members had their hands full with the arrival of several new birds, which are highlighted below!

Many visitors of the Aviary got the chance to see these additions and viewed our other residents: a Barred Owl, two Barn Owls, and various species of turtles and snakes.

Naturalists and volunteers were on-hand at the Aviary to promote stewardship of our wildlife and other natural resources through the stories, or "tales" of how these animals come into the care of Rocky Gap. They also provided an inside look at the care and maintenance of the birds of prey and reptiles. Without the help of our volunteers, many of these services would not have been possible.

We also depended on visitor support. Visitors helped the Aviary with the care and maintenance by adopting an animal. They paid an adoption fee and received a Certificate of Adoption for one of our animals. They also received periodic newsletters, an information sheet about the animal adopted, and a Scales & Tales bookmark.

Visitors also gave contributions that assisted in the purchase of raptor food, reptile food, raptor jesses, reptile habitat cages, turtle enclosures and snake handling equipment. We'd like to thank everyone for his or her support!

New Additions!

The most recent addition to the aviary is an **Eastern Screech Owl**. We are very fortunate to have this new bird as she demonstrates the gray-phase of her species. She joins the two existing red-phase Eastern Screech Owls. Screech owls are *dichromatic*, meaning they come in two distinct color morphs. They are either uniformly gray or uniformly rufous (red), with darker streaking on the body. Both color phases make them very difficult to distinguish from surrounding tree bark.

The majestic **Great Horned Owl** has settled into his enclosure comfortably. This bird came to us because of an injury that caused him to lose his right wing. His quiet, watchful eye scans members of the public warily and he will snap his beak and hiss to warn any visitor that they have come too close.

The **Black Vulture**, a bird that was imprinted when it was saved by firefighters from a burning structure, has proved to be a very intelligent creature and the public often experience first-hand his inquisitive nature.

The **Red-tail Hawk** is always a big hit with visitors. Many people are amazed that this skilled predator can be found in their own backyard! Despite his injured wing that does not allow flight, this bird moves quite gracefully from perch to perch.



Great Horned Owl

Volunteers Make A Difference

Why Volunteer? Not only will you be helping the animals, you will certainly make new friends, learn a lot about birds and reptiles, and, if you're already an expert, enjoy the experience of teaching people about the birds of prey and the reptiles.

We rely on groups like the *Americorp HallSTARS!* Program at Frostburg University. They provide the aviary

students who volunteer their time to staff the aviary, care for the animals, and assist with the educational programs. The HallSTARS! rebuild perches and maintain the facility for cleanliness and safety.

Joining the crew that cares for the Aviary are two dedicated volunteers. They spend time caring for the animals and perform maintenance

on the facility. Their volunteer time is unique because of their abilities. They have working knowledge of animal health care and understand their behavior.

Would you like to help us make a difference? We need people like you to donate time, energy, and experience in a variety

of areas. The Aviary is a unique, educational, and fun place to volunteer! We offer a variety of volunteer opportunities for adults and students. Regardless of your interests or schedule, there is something for you! Interested in becoming a volunteer at the Aviary? Please contact smilbourne@dnr.state.md.us or call Rocky Gap State Park at (301) 722-1480.



Visitors Welcome!

As we brace for the winter season, we are continuing to make upgrades in the bird enclosures to prepare them for winter. Throughout the fall and winter, visitors are encouraged to visit the Aviary to view the birds. Although the building will be only staffed during feeding time, the enclosures allow visitors to view the birds without a Naturalist on-hand.

When you began to hear songbirds chirping early in the morning and to see coltsfoot line the roadside, the Aviary will be gearing up for a season full of fun and educational programs featuring the birds of prey and reptiles. Please join us for an amazing experience. The message of these animals is unforgettable. You can enjoy their beauty up close and in person while learning how to change the way you do things to save hundreds of their fellow species!

We look forward to seeing you at the Rocky Gap State Park Aviary.

Stay tuned for the Spring 2006 Aviary Newsletter for a listing of summer programs and Aviary hours of operation. If you would like more information, to receive an email copy of this newsletter or a copy of our schedule of events for summer 2006, please email smilbourne@dnr.state.md.us or call Rocky Gap State Park at (301) 722-1480.



Did You Know?



- Owls are one of the only birds that can see the color blue!
- A pair of nesting barn owls is capable of catching and eating nearly 3,000 rats a year!
- In 1995, a National Aeronautics and Space Administration employee bought six plastic owls to protect the space shuttle from woodpeckers!
- One of the fastest flying birds is the peregrine falcon. It's been clocked at 90 mph! There are even accounts of these raptors diving at speeds up to 200 mph!
- Among the longest-lived birds is the bald eagle. There are records of bald eagles living over 50 years in captivity!
- A "flock of Jenny's" means there's group of female owls together!
- The jaw structure of a reptile does not permit chewing; they can only tear their food!

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